DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 183 682 UD 020 316

AUTHOR Scott, Ralph: Davis, Arthur, Jr.
TITLE Preschool Education and Busing: Do We Have Our Priorities Straight?
PUB DATE 79
NOTE 7p.: Paper presented at National Urban Education Association's National Conference on Urban Education (5th, Detroit, MI, November 17-20, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement: Early Experience: *Enrichment Programs: Family Environment: *Family Involvement: *Home Programs: Learning Readiness: *Preschool Education: Program Descriptions: Resource Allocations
IDENTIFIERS *Home Start Program

ABSTRACT

This report examines the procedures employed in the Home Start Program, which offered prekindergarten readiness enrichment for economically disadvantaged children, ages two through five. The program focused on regular visits to the home by paraprofessional home workers, and took into account parental needs as well as the multifaceted development of all the children in the family. The authors examine various data which indicate that the children participating in the program secured higher achievement scores than their siblings who did not participate. They conclude that if the racial gap in academic achievement is to be closed, it is counterproductive to direct resources into busing to achieve that goal. It is urged that greater attention be given to home-centered enrichment during the preschool years. (Author/WP)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

FEB 19 1980

PRESCHOOL EDUCATION AND BUSING:
Do We Have Our Priorities Straight?

Paper presented at National Urban Education Association Fifth

Ralph Scott
University of Northern Iowa

Arthur Davis Jr.
Northeastern University

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY Ralph Scott

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED183682

VD020316

It is not unusual for well informed individuals, when dealing with complex problems, to arrive at diverse, and sometimes inconsistent, conclusions as to how an issue can best be handled. In their analogy of wise men assessing the characteristics of an elephant in the dark, the Greek philosophers sought to illustrate how one phenomenon may be differentially perceived. In some respects, educators have responded to current schooling questions as did the blind people: this seems to have been especially true on broad policy questions which are emotionally freighted, and which directly affect the lives of poor and minority children.

It is not easy to shape straightforward policies which enhance prospects of disadvantaged youth. As one example, consider evidence that some educational programs have been inflationary, and that inflation hits hardest at poor families. Clearly, there is the possibility that some policies designed to aid certain segments of our population have proven harmful to them.

A cursory review of contemporary events reveals just how interwoven and self contradicting may be some issues and responses within school and society. One paradox involves our vulnerability in energy, which may be contrasted with unnecessary usage of energy in conducting business within the nation's schools. Large amounts of oil are consumed to transfer children from their neighborhood schools in order to achieve racial balance. This is done without any evidence that desegregation promotes racial harmony or enhances minority learning.[1,2]

Another contradiction involves the degree to which various influences determine human learning. There is considerable evidence that family background factors account for far more than half of what children learn.[3] But we witness

today a plethora of mandated or voluntary (non-neighborhood) desegregation programs. Whether these integration measures assume the guise of magnet schools, educational parks, or middle schools, the net effect is the same. The natural bonds of home, school and community are diluted and weakened. Major reviews have probed into the academic effect of programs designed to promote the learning of vulnerable children:[4,5] the results are not encouraging, and support the contention that today's educational emphasis on learning, as it occurs within schools, fails to adequately consider how families might enhance the learning of disadvantaged youth.

Finally, there appears to be little correspondence between capital outlays and economic return. School budgets generally allow approximately 50% more to educate a secondary school student than a student in the elementary grades. Few communities provide even a pittance for family-based preschool enrichment. From what we know about human learning, however, it is during the preschool years, when the brain is most rapidly developing, that enrichment has its greatest effect. Bloom and Hunt have estimated that about two-thirds of IQ and one-third of lifelong learning potentials are shaped by the time the child is six, or enters first grade.[6,7] Similar estimates prevail with respect to motivational trends.

If it is true that the nation faces a very real energy crisis, that families exert the most significant influence on children's learning, and the preschool years powerfully impact on lifelong learning patterns, then perhaps it is time to reconsider national educational priorities. For over a decade, we have conducted research on family-based preschool enrichment. The results are sufficiently encouraging to warrant hope it may soon be possible to formulate family-centered policies which can provide poor children with genuine forms of educational enrichment.

THE HOME START PROJECT

Briefly, we now examine Home Start, which gave priority to early learning within the context of full parental participation.

The program offered three years of prekindergarten readiness enrichment for youngsters from two to five years of age. Once a week, hourly visits were made in the child's home. In these visits paraprofessional home workers, who resided within the Waterloo, Iowa, "target area" served by the program, conferred with the mother or mother surrogate concerning family interaction. Focus was given to what the child had been doing in the home, questions that any family member might have with respect to what the child was doing, how books and toys could be appropriately selected and made available. A large inventory of toys and books was maintained and parents were encouraged to visit the storeroom and check out materials.

Content and process of the paraprofessional home workers' parental contacts were assessed in weekly staff meetings attended by professional Home Start staff. In staff meetings, questions were entertained as to whether a professional Home Start member should become involved in the home to assess the feasibility of referral to a community agency. About one-third of all participating children were identified as being either physically or mentally handicapped, and their parents were referred to a community agency. Most of the children referred were considered multiply handicapped. Referrals included children who were emotionally disturbed, crippled or mentally retarded, or who had handicaps in hearing, vision or speech.

Individualized enrichment was built around an integration of each child's interests and of diagnostic results obtained through an achievement-oriented preschool test, the Iowa Tests of Preschool Development. The test was administered by paraprofessionals at six-month intervals and contains four subtests (language, visual motor, memory and concepts). After each testing, a report was prepared by the school psychologist and sent to the Home Start director. The report suggested various types of activities as appropriate for the child. The director discussed the results with the home worker and any professional member of the staff who was working with the family.

The year prior to kindergarten admission, in addition to continuing and regular home visits, the children also received an academic year of prekindergarten enrichment, two and one-half hours a day, five days a week. The teacher was a college graduate, with a major in lower elementary education. Early in the prekindergarten year, the children were given the Learning-Reading System Seriation Test and each child's performance on this test's five factors was assessed to formulate individualized learning strategies.

Subject selection was initiated during the summer of 1968, when census tract cards were employed to identify parents of all children 1) who resided in the four target attendance centers designated by the Office of Economic Opportunity as socioeconomically disadvantaged and from which participants for the program were drawn,and 2) who were eligible to attend kindergarten in the fall of 1971. The program director conferred with community agencies to increase the likelihood of including in the program new arrivals to the city.

The parents of 89 children (51 black, 38 white) applied for admission into Home Start and all were accepted. Seventy-one children (47 blacks, 24 whites) were still residing in the target areas and participating in the program when they reached their fifth birthday. There was no evidence of selective migration, inasmuch as Stanford Binet IQs of Home Start children moving from the target areas were not significantly different from IQs of those remaining in the target attendance centers. The children continued in the program until August 1971. Not a single child who still lived in the target area at the time of kindergarten enrollment had dropped out.

Longitudinal Achievement Results

When Home Start children were in third grade, their performance on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) was assessed. Forty-four of the children had older siblings, and since matching by traditional socioeconomic status criteria fails to

control for home background factors, it was decided to employ these older siblings as control. The feasibility of such an approach was suggested by Bachman, who found little if any relationship between ordinal position and IQ or school achievement.[8]

Perhaps because of social class differences, there was no evidence that white children gained from Home Start participation. However, black youngsters secured significantly higher scores on the following ITBS measures: Spelling, Usage, Total Language, Maps, Graphs, Reference, Total Word Study, Math Concepts, Math Problems, Total Math, and Composite ITBS. The largest single difference occurred in Math Problems in which black subjects' scores averaged 1.2 grade equivalences above those of their older and non-Home Start siblings. There were parallels between these findings and results from prior assessments. It was previously noted that black subjects initially demonstrated sharp and program-related gains in receptive language, but that these gains had declined by first grade.[9] The present experiment provided further support for the Stodolsky-Karlson position that there is little durability to short-term verbal gains, and extends the implications beyond early verbal behavior to achievement in the presumably language-linked subject areas of vocabulary and reading.[10] Conversely, the significant third-grade differences in mathematics (and areas requiring at least some specific math skills such as Maps, Graphs, and Reference) lend further support to the hypothesis advanced earlier that the Home Start program produced latent learning within the mathematic and spatial areas.[11]

Do We Have Our Priorities Straight?

Findings over an eight year span, as summarized here, suggest that minority children can be most effectively enabled to perform better in school if enrichment is provided within the home, during the preschool years, and when emphasis is placed on family concerns. If replication studies should affirm our findings, it would appear that it is time to reconsider current priorities given by the federal and

state governments with respect to enhancing academic opportunities for minority children. Admittedly, these conclusions are emotionally laden and may be difficult to implement. But if we have correctly read our data, perhaps it is time to abandon forced busing as an educational policy, and to focus on the strengthening of minority family life during the presumably crucial preschool years.

---

1. Gerard, Harold B. and Miller, Normal. School Desegregation: A Long-Term Study. New York: Plenum Press, 1975.

2. Stephan, Walter G. School Desegregation: An evaluation of predictions made in Brown v. Board of Education. Psychological Bulletin, Vol. 85 (2), 1978, 217-238.

3. Scott, Ralph and Walberg, Herbert. Schools alone are insufficient: A response to Edmonds. Educational Leadership, Vol. 37 (1), October, 1979, 24-28.

4. Averch, A., et al. How Effective is Schooling? New York: Educational Technology Publications, 1974.

5. Arter, Judith A. and Jenkins, Joseph R. Differential diagnosis-prescriptive teaching: A critical appraisal. Review of Educational Research, Vol. 49 (4), fall, 1979, 517-555.

6. Bloom, B. S. Stability and Change in Human Characteristics. New York: Wiley, 1964.

7. Hunt, J. McV. The Challenge of Incompetence and Poverty. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1969.

8. Bachman, J. G. Youth in Transition. Ann Arbor: Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, 1970.

9. Scott, Ralph. Home Start: Follow-up assessment of a family-centered preschool enrichment program. Psychology in the Schools, Vol. 11, 1974, 147-149.

10. Stodolsky, S. S. and Karlson, A. L. Differential outcomes of a Montessori Curriculum. Elementary School Journal, Vol. 74, 1974, 419-433.